> On a strictly exegetical basis, at face value, apart from any doctrinal, theological or denominational biases, provide a comprehensive analysis of all New Testament references to the time frame in which they indicate Christ would return. Does the New Testament teach that Jesus would return again within the lifetimes of his disciples? And on a purely exegetical basis, without theological biases, is there any reason to conclude that the New Testament teaches that Christ would return after the first century?

Of course. This is a complex and central question in New Testament studies. A strictly exegetical analysis requires examining the relevant passages in their immediate literary and historical context, setting aside later theological frameworks developed to address the very issue we are exploring.

Here is a comprehensive analysis of the New Testament references to the time frame of Christ's return, categorized by the type of statement made.

Category 1: Explicit "Within This Generation" Statements

These are the most direct and challenging passages for any interpretation that postpones the Second Coming beyond the first century.

- **Matthew 16:27-28 (cf. Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27):** "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. **Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.**"
  - **Exegesis:** The setting is Jesus speaking to his contemporary disciples. The time indicator is unambiguous: "some who are standing here will not taste death." This places the event within the natural lifespan of his audience. The event described is the Son of Man "coming in his kingdom." This is a theologically loaded phrase, but at face value, it refers to a future, powerful, and definitive manifestation of Christ's royal authority.
- **Matthew 24:34 (cf. Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32): "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.**"

- **Exegesis:** This statement concludes the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24), Jesus' premier prophecy about the end times. The phrase "all these things" (Greek: *panta tauta*) refers directly to the cataclysmic events just described, including the "abomination that causes desolation" (v.15), the "great distress" (v.21), celestial signs (v.29), and finally, "the sign of the Son of Man in heaven" and his coming "on the clouds of the sky" (v.30). The time indicator "this generation" (Greek: *hē genea hautē*) in its most natural, historical sense refers to the people living at the time of Jesus.

Category 2: Statements Implying Imminence for the Original Audience

These passages use language that creates a strong expectation of nearness among the first readers.

- **James 5:8-9:** "You too, be patient and stand firm, **because the Lord's coming is near.**... **The Judge is standing at the door!**"
  - **Exegesis:** James encourages patience based on the proximity of the Lord's coming. The metaphor "standing at the door" is a powerful image of immediate imminence, suggesting the event could occur at any moment.
- **1 Peter 4:7:** "**The end of all things is near.** Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray."
  - **Exegesis:** Peter bases an ethical command ("be alert and of sober mind") on the conviction that "the end of all things is near." This is presented as a present reality for his readers, not a distant theological truth for a future age.
- **1 John 2:18:** "Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour."
  - **Exegesis:** John does not say "the last days" (a potentially long period) but "the last *hour*" (Greek: *hōra*), a much more urgent and compressed time frame. He sees the appearance of "antichrists" as a definitive sign that this final, eschatological period is already underway.
- **Romans 13:11-12:** "And do this, understanding the present time: **The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is**

nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here."

- **Exegesis:** Paul tells the Roman believers that their salvation (in its final, consummated sense) is "nearer now." The metaphors of night ending and day dawning reinforce the sense that the climax of history is immediately impending.

- **1 Corinthians 7:29-31:** "What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that **the time is short**.... For this world in its present form is passing away."
  - **Exegesis:** Paul's advice on marriage and worldly engagements is framed by the conviction that "the time is short" and the present world order is transient and about to pass away.
- **Philippians 4:5:** "Let your gentleness be evident to all. **The Lord is near.**"
  - **Exegesis:** While this could refer to God's omnipresence, in the context of Pauline eschatology, it is most naturally read as a reference to the imminent return of Christ.
- **Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20:** "The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants **what must soon take place**.... **because the time is near**.... 'These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants **the things that must soon take place**.'... Then he told me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, **because the time is near**.... **Look, I am coming soon!**... He who testifies to these things says, '**Yes, I am coming soon.**'"
  - **Exegesis:** The entire book of Revelation is framed by language of imminence. The Greek words for "soon" (*tachy*) and "near" (*engys*) are used repeatedly. The command *not* to seal the book (contrast Daniel 12:4, where the prophecy is sealed for a *distant* time) underscores the expectation that the events described are for the immediate future of the first-century audience.

Category 3: Statements that Could Allow for a Delay

A purely exegetical analysis must also account for passages that introduce an element of uncertainty or potential delay, which temper the pure imminence.

- **Matthew 24:36, 42, 44:** "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father... Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come... So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."
    - **Exegesis:** Immediately after stating "this generation will not pass away," Jesus emphasizes that the *exact* "day or hour" is unknown. This creates a tension: the general time frame (within the generation) is given, but the precise moment is withheld to encourage constant vigilance. It warns against setting a specific date, but does not negate the generational time frame.
- **2 Peter 3:3-9:** "Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come... **Where is this 'coming' he promised?** Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'... But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. **The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.** Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."
    - **Exegesis:** This is the latest New Testament text to address the issue and directly confronts the problem of the delayed Parousia. Scoffers are mocking the promise of Christ's return, using the argument that the first generation of believers had died ("our ancestors died"). The author's response is not to say the scoffers are wrong about the delay, but to *reinterpret the nature of the delay*. He argues that God's perception of time is different and that the delay is an act of mercy. This passage explicitly acknowledges that the expected imminence had not been fulfilled and provides a theological explanation for it.

Conclusion: Answers to the Specific Questions

1. Does the New Testament teach that Jesus would return again within the lifetimes of his disciples?

On a strictly exegetical basis, **the dominant and most straightforward reading of the key texts points decisively to "yes."** The explicit statements of Jesus in the Gospels ("this generation," "some standing here will not taste death") are the strongest evidence. This expectation was not a minor theme but the driving eschatological

hope of the early church, as evidenced by the pervasive language of imminence and nearness throughout the epistles and Revelation. The original audience of these texts would have understood them to mean that Christ's return was a pending event in their own lifetime.

2. Is there any reason to conclude that the New Testament teaches that Christ would return after the first century?

On a purely exegetical basis, **there is no verse that explicitly states, "Christ will return after the first century" or "long after your generation has passed."** The evidence for a post-first-century return is primarily *implicit and inferential*, derived from two sources within the text itself:

- **The "Unknown Hour" Passages:** The consistent teaching that the *exact* day and hour is unknown (Matthew 24:36) inherently allows for the *possibility* of a delay, even if the general expectation was for imminence.
- **2 Peter 3's Response to Delay:** The existence of 2 Peter 3 is the clearest internal evidence that the church was already grappling with the non-occurrence of the Parousia within the expected timeframe. The text provides a theological rationale for the delay but does not set a new date.

Therefore, while the **explicit teaching** is one of imminence within the first century, the text itself contains the **seeds of reflection** that would later allow the church to understand the return of Christ as an event that, despite the initial expectation, could occur at a later, unknown time. The tension between the clear imminence texts and the reality of a delayed Parousia is a tension that exists within the New Testament itself.